

# Community service keeps youth award winner busy

Boys and Girls Clubs honor  
Fort Lewis Youth of the Year

By Barbara L. Sellers  
Northwest Guardian

Boys and Girls Clubs of America offer more than 25 national programs, and the National Youth of the Year program is one of them, said Katrina Clacks, teen program director, Child and youth Services, North Fort Youth Center.

“These programs address today’s most pressing issues, teaching us the skills we need to succeed in life,” said Jennifer Pearce, winner of the 2004 Fort Lewis Youth of the Year.

Runner-up, Natashia Howard, a junior at Lakes High School, was named Youth of the Month.

Pearce, daughter of Tammey and Sgt. 1st Class Robert Pearce, 62nd Medical Brigade, has been busy preparing to compete at the next level of the Youth of the Year competition, sponsored by the Reader’s Digest Foundation.

“To qualify for the competition, I had to show involvement in the Youth Services program for at least two years, and I also had to show community involvement,” Pearce said.

She has to put together and submit a

whole packet that’s centered around her goals and character, Clacks said.

“Several things are taken into consideration,” she said. “The judges will look at her grades, her leadership skills, how she gives back to her family and community and, even more importantly, what being a member of the Boys and Girls Club of America has meant to her.”

The packet also requires Pearce to write two essays, Clacks said.

“The first one must tell how the Boys and Girls Club of America has impacted her life and how she has given something back to it,” she said. “The second one will be about how she shows leadership,

her life goals and how she plans to achieve them.”

One way Pearce has been giving back is by serving as the vice president of Keystone Club, which is a branch of the Boys and Girls Club of

America.

“I show a lot of dedication and bring a lot of leadership to the Keystone Club,” she said. “I give a lot of encouragement to kids, and have been very involved with youth services. Some kids simply need good role models. Sometimes all they need is someone who can shine some light on their issues.”

When Pearce and three other panel members of the Keystone Club went to Colorado Springs July 19 to 25, 2003, the experience left her with a life-altering

impression, she said. “We made happy hats and took them to a hospital there for sick children,” Pearce said. “One little girl picked out my hat and gave me a big hug. Tears started falling down my face and I knew then that I wanted to become a pediatric nurse and work with kids.”

Pearce also had similar experiences while working as a volunteer during the post’s annual Special Olympics event, and she’s also actively involved with Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps at her school, she said

“Even if students don’t end up joining the military, Junior ROTC still gives us discipline and teaches us how to show proper respect to other people,” Pearce said. “At the same time it teaches us Army stuff, it also teaches us English, history and mathematics.”

In addition, the Boys and Girls Club of America also teaches young people about the environment, health, the arts, careers, alcohol, drug and pregnancy prevention, gang prevention, leadership development and athletics, she said.

Pearce will now compete in the state competition March 30 at the Experience Music Project museum in Seattle.

The winner of the state competition will then compete at regional, and the winner of regional will compete for the national title, said Chandra Hall, director of Program Services, Boys and Girls Clubs of America of South Puget Sound.

“If she wins the regional competition, she will get a \$5,000 scholarship, and if she wins the national competition, she would get an additional \$10,000 scholar-



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Jennifer Pearce was recently named 2004 Fort Lewis youth of the Year. “These programs address today’s most pressing issues, teaching us the skills we need to succeed in life,” said Pearce, who is currently busy preparing to compete at the next level of the Youth of the Year competition, sponsored by the Reader’s Digest Foundation. Natashia Howard, a junior at Lakes High School, was named Youth of the Month.

ship,” Clacks said.

Winning that scholarship money could make a positive difference to Pearce toward achieving her educational goals of attending the University of Towson, Towson, Md.

“I will be the first on in my family in

three generations to earn a college degree,” said Pearce, who has a sister Kristy, 20, in Maryland, and a brother, Brandon, 13. “Family is very important to me because I moved around a lot.”

Other family members include a two dogs and a Chinese fighting fish.

# Children of deployed Soldiers receive gift of warmth from area volunteers

‘Quilts for Kids’ program  
brings comfort, security

By K.L. Vantran  
American Forces Press Service

Every Thursday, and some Saturdays, volunteers at Fort Lewis lug sewing machines to the Army Community Service building so they can create quilts for children of those deployed in the war on terrorism.

About 18 months ago, Marty Alexander, library technician for the Fort Lewis Library System, saw a sam-

ple of a cuddle quilt on TV. An avid quilter, Alexander went about making one. It took her four hours.

Alexander said she thought if she could get an assembly line going, she’d be in business. She talked with Mary Herrera, chief of family services, Army Community Service. Donna Arias, a financial planner at ACS, joined the team, and the “Quilts for Kids” program began. Since then, about 90 children have received the lap quilts.

“When the war started, I got to thinking about all the kids whose parents would be going away,” said Alexander. “I wanted to do something

for them.”

In the beginning, about 20 volunteers answered the call, said Herrera. “People brought in their own sewing machines,” she said. “Some donated fabric. It was really nice.”

Alexander said they’ve received several donations of material and batting to include more than 50 yards of washed and ironed material from one individual.

Quite a few reservists stationed at Madigan Army Medical Center pitched in, said Alexander.

“You haven’t lived until you’ve seen a lieutenant colonel rip out seams with a pocket knife,” she added with a

laugh.

Today, about six stalwarts keep the program going.

Making a quilt involves purchasing the fabric, laundering, ironing, cutting and sewing, said Herrera.

Volunteers’ experience ranges from the novice to expert. “People could do what they were comfortable with for as long as they liked,” said Herrera. “And someone with no experience could be paired with a quilter from way back.”

Most of the recipients have been young children, said Herrera. “We’ve given quilts to newborns (and to) chronically ill and hospitalized chil-

dren, but mostly to kindergartners and third- and fourth-graders,” she added.

Herrera said each child has been very appreciative when receiving a quilt.

Alexander said while making quilts takes quite a bit of time, there are many rewards. She recalled the day a mother and her son came to the library to thank them for a quilt.

“It was one of the hottest days of the summer,” she said. “And the little boy was carrying his quilt. He wouldn’t give it up.” Afterward, Alexander said she went into the bathroom and cried.

